CINEMATIC MEMORY, THE DISCOURSE OF NATIONAL UNITY, AND SEMIOTIC REPRESENTATION

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Abstract

This study examines the visual, narrative, and ideological strategies through which the discourse of national unity and solidarity is constructed in Turkish Cypriot cinema. The sample consists of Shadows and Faces (Derviş Zaim, 2010/2011), The Unknown Prisoners Documentary (Cem Kar, 2011), and Code Name Venus (Tamer Garip, 2012). Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical research design and combines semiotic analysis, content analysis, and comparative thematic interpretation. The theoretical framework is built on Roland Barthes's concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth; Christian Metz's approach to cinematic language; and the literatures on collective memory, trauma cinema, and representation. The films were coded at the levels of scene, character, space, colour, lighting, sound, archival material, testimony, and symbolic motif. These codes were then organized around four central themes: homeland and sacrifice, identity and belonging, memory and confrontation, and solidarity and resistance. The findings indicate that all three films produce a discourse of national unity, although they do so through different aesthetic and ideological registers. Shadows and Faces transforms historical trauma into an allegorical and ethical field of confrontation through the metaphor of shadow and screen; The Unknown Prisoners Documentary foregrounds collective mourning and the demand for justice through testimony, archival evidence, and the image of the missing body; Code Name Venus constructs a more explicit patriotic narrative through historical dramatization, heroism, sacrifice, and national belonging. The article argues that Turkish Cypriot cinema is not merely an artistic domain that reflects historical events, but also a communicative field of representation that organizes collective memory, gives meaning to trauma, and reproduces national identity.

Keywords: Turkish Cypriot cinema, national unity, semiotics, collective memory, trauma cinema, representation

1. Introduction

Cinema is not merely one of the aesthetic forms through which modern societies produce experience; it is also a powerful communicative field that shapes how historical events will be remembered, who will be positioned as victim or perpetrator, which images will be incorporated

into national memory, and which silences will be excluded from public visibility. Especially when major ruptures such as war, conflict, displacement, siege, and social trauma are at stake, cinema exceeds the cold chronology of historiography and constructs the emotional, visual, and symbolic texture of collective memory. The political and social experience of the Turkish Cypriot community from the 1950s to 1974 is therefore a multilayered field that must be examined not only within the framework of diplomatic or security history, but also in terms of representation, identity, belonging, and modes of remembrance. For this reason, analysing how the discourse of national unity and solidarity is produced in Turkish Cypriot cinema is significant not only for film studies, but also for communication studies, political psychology, cultural memory studies, and semiotics.

From its early stages, the Cyprus issue was frequently addressed in Turkish cinema through the axes of national struggle, heroism, sacrifice, and victimhood. Films on Cyprus produced during the 1960s and 1970s often constructed a more direct, conflict-oriented, and monological narrative universe in parallel with the political atmosphere of the period. By contrast, a considerable number of post-2000 productions began to reconsider the past in more complex, multilayered, and confrontational ways. This transformation indicates not only an aesthetic differentiation in cinematic language, but also a reorganization of collective memory. Cyprus is no longer represented exclusively as a homeland to be rescued or a border to be defended; it is also represented as a site of memory in which trauma, neighbourliness, loss, silence, shared suffering, and the struggle for identity are intertwined.

This article examines this transformation through three productions: Derviş Zaim's Shadows and Faces, Cem Kar's The Unknown Prisoners Documentary, and Tamer Garip's Code Name Venus. These three works have been selected together because each enters the historical memory of the Turkish Cypriot community through a different cinematic gateway. Shadows and Faces transfers the intercommunal violence that escalated in 1963 onto an allegorical plane through the aesthetics of the Karagöz screen and the metaphors of shadow and image; The Unknown Prisoners establishes the ethical field of documentary reality through missing fighters, testimonies, archival records, and journalistic memory; Code Name Venus processes the historical line extending from 1955 to 1974 within a dramatic, romantic, and heroism-centred narrative. Taken together, these three films provide an appropriate sample for demonstrating that the discourse of national unity in Turkish Cypriot cinema is constructed not in a single form, but through different modalities such as allegory, testimony, and dramatic mobilization.

The central research question of this article is as follows: Through which semiotic, narrative, and ideological strategies is the discourse of national unity and solidarity constructed in the selected films of Turkish Cypriot cinema? This main question is divided into three sub-questions. First, through which audiovisual signs are motifs such as homeland, identity, belonging, loss, solidarity, resistance, sacrifice, and confrontation represented in the films? Second, how do these signs produce ideological meaning in terms of Roland Barthes's concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth? Third, through which distinct aesthetic routes do fiction, documentary, and dramatic-action forms construct the discourse of national unity? The answers to these questions will demonstrate that Turkish Cypriot cinema does not merely narrate the past; it also constructs a way of looking at the past.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study approaches cinema not as a form of visual entertainment, but as a communicative system that produces meaning, organizes memory, and represents social identity. Cinematic language is not composed solely of technical elements such as camera, editing, lighting, sound, and performance; each of these elements operates as a sign within cultural codes. The position of a character within the frame, the face left in shadow by the lighting, the testimony suppressed by silence, the moment at which archival footage is introduced, or the context in which a flag appears all guide the viewer's interpretation of a historical event. Therefore, film analysis cannot be limited to the question of “what is being narrated?” It must also ask “how is it narrated?”, “which meanings are naturalized?”, “which ideological assumptions are made invisible?”, and “into what position of witnessing is the spectator invited?”

Roland Barthes's semiotic approach provides a fundamental analytical possibility in this context. For Barthes, the sign is not merely a simple unit of representation pointing to an object or event; it is also an order through which cultural and ideological meanings are carried. Denotation refers to the explicit meaning indicated by the sign at first sight, whereas connotation refers to the second-level meaning that this explicit sign acquires within a cultural, historical, and ideological context. For instance, a flag seen in a film is, at the denotative level, a national symbol; at the connotative level, however, it may evoke sacrifice, belonging, the desire for protection, social cohesion, or the legitimacy of the state. Barthes's concept of myth concerns the presentation of these connotative meanings as natural, self-evident, and unquestionable truths. Cinema is powerful precisely at this point: it can transmit historically constructed meanings to spectators as if they were natural emotions.

Christian Metz's approach to cinematic language constitutes the second theoretical foundation for understanding the sign systems of films. For Metz, cinema does not possess grammatical rules in the same way that spoken language does; nevertheless, it has its own syntagmatic and narrative orders in the production of meaning. Cinema constructs a chain of meaning by placing images, sounds, movements, and cuts in sequence. This chain is not interpreted by the spectator only consciously; it is also perceived through emotional and cultural memory. In films about Cyprus, historical archives, laments, heroic utterances, official speeches, village spaces, border images, photographs of the missing, and social rituals enter this cinematic chain. Cinematic language thus becomes the technical and aesthetic organization of national memory.

The literature on collective memory forms the third theoretical axis of the study. Collective memory is not simply the remembering of the past by a society; it is the reconstruction of the past through particular narratives, symbols, rituals, traumas, and media representations. Societies do not carry the past as it was; they interpret it in accordance with their needs, fears, ideals, and political positions. The Turkish Cypriot community's memory of the 1963-1974 period was shaped around experiences such as displacement, siege, loss, threat, resistance, and trust directed toward Turkey. Cinema makes these experiences visible and turns them into part of intergenerational transmission. A film scene can sometimes become embedded in social memory more powerfully than a history book, because the spectator not only acquires information, but

also participates emotionally in pain, fear, hope, and solidarity.

The perspective of trauma cinema is particularly decisive for The Unknown Prisoners and Shadows and Faces. Trauma is not only the destruction that emerges at the moment of experience; as long as it cannot be narrated, recognized, or represented publicly, it recurs as a form of absence. Cinema does not always have to show trauma directly. Sometimes silence, an empty chair, a photograph of a missing person, an unfinished sentence, an interrupted gaze, or a darkened space represents trauma more powerfully. Kaplan and Wang's discussions of trauma cinema emphasize that the spectator should be called not merely into the position of an eye looking at suffering, but into the position of an ethical witness. In this article, testimony is used not only in the sense of documentary record, but also in the sense of the ethical responsibility assumed by the spectator in the face of historical pain.

From the perspective of representation theory, films do not mirror social reality exactly; they select, frame, code, and reconstruct it. The cinematic representation of the Turkish Cypriot community is therefore not a neutral reflection but a field of meaning produced from within particular historical and cultural positions. This does not diminish the value of the films; on the contrary, it makes them analysable. Every film produces meaning through what it renders visible as much as through what it leaves silent. The allegorical distance of Shadows and Faces, the ethics of testimony in The Unknown Prisoners, and the dramatic patriotism of Code Name Venus are three different representational forms of the same historical memory. Accordingly, this study does not aim to judge the films through a binary of right or wrong; rather, it aims to analyse their mechanisms of meaning production.

3. Methodology

The research is based on a qualitative descriptive and analytical design. Since the study aims to understand through which signs the discourse of national unity and solidarity is produced in Turkish Cypriot cinema, it privileges in-depth interpretation rather than quantitative measurement. Within this framework, semiotic analysis, content analysis, and comparative thematic analysis were used together. The study adopts a holistic analytical strategy that reads film texts within their own aesthetic structures while also considering their historical, cultural, and ideological contexts.

The sample was determined through purposive sampling. The three selected productions directly or indirectly address the historical ruptures, losses, resistance, and identity search experienced by the Turkish Cypriot community during the 1963-1974 period and represent different genres and narrative forms. Shadows and Faces transfers the aesthetics of shadow play into the divided memory of Cyprus through its allegorical fictional structure. The Unknown Prisoners Documentary documents collective pain through missing fighters and journalistic memory by means of testimony and archive-centred narration. Code Name Venus presents the existential struggle of the Turkish Cypriot community within a broad historical panorama through dramatic fiction, romantic tension, and historical plotting. This diversity made it possible to examine how the discourse of national unity transforms not within a single cinematic form, but across different genres.

The data collection process was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, the films were examined scene by scene through repeated viewing, and notes were taken for each production on plot structure, character positioning, use of space, dialogue, symbolic motif, music, sound, archival material, colour, and lighting. In the second stage, secondary sources in the fields of Cypriot history, Turkish cinema, propaganda, representation, collective memory, trauma cinema, and semiotics were reviewed in order to support the film analysis. In the third stage, filmic signs and historical context were cross-read, thereby allowing audiovisual data to be evaluated not only aesthetically but also in terms of their social and ideological meanings.

The analytical process consisted of four stages. The first stage was descriptive analysis. The key scenes, narrative structure, and historical context of each film were described in detail. The second stage was coding. During coding, recurring signs such as the flag, screen, shadow, image, puppet, cave, photograph of the missing, list of names, closed space, lament, archival footage, uniform, oath, Red Crescent tent, sea, body, home, village, border, and official speech were identified. The third stage was thematic analysis. The codes were grouped under four main themes: homeland and sacrifice; identity and belonging; memory and confrontation; solidarity and resistance. The fourth stage was comparative interpretation. At this stage, the three productions were evaluated together in terms of genre, narrative axis, ideological position, cinematographic preference, source of reality, and method of constructing unity.

The semiotic analysis was based on Barthes's two-level model of signification. Each sign was first defined at the denotative level and then interpreted in terms of its cultural and ideological meanings at the connotative level. For example, the TMT oath in Code Name Venus is, at the denotative level, a declaration of organizational commitment; at the connotative level, it is the cinematic condensation of personal security, honour, sacred values, secrecy, sacrifice, and the will for national existence. In The Unknown Prisoners, the photograph of a missing person is, at the denotative level, a visual image belonging to an individual; at the connotative level, it symbolizes absence, the search for justice, and resistance against forgetting. In Shadows and Faces, the screen is, at the denotative level, a surface belonging to the Karagöz performance; at the connotative level, it is a historical-ideological threshold on which truth is both reflected and concealed.

A tripartite logic of control was adopted to strengthen the reliability of the research. First, filmic signs were interpreted not on the basis of isolated scenes but through recurring patterns. Second, the findings were related to the historical and theoretical literature. Third, the three productions were examined comparatively, preventing the analysis from remaining limited to the meaning world of a single film. The limitation of the study is that it covers only three productions and does not include field data on audience reception. However, the aim is not to measure audience effects, but to analyse the mechanisms of meaning production within cinematic texts. No data collection process involving human participants was conducted; the research is based on document and audiovisual text analysis of publicly accessible films, documentary records, and academic sources.

4. Findings

The findings show that the three films construct the discourse of national unity and solidarity within a shared field of historical memory, yet produce this discourse through different aesthetic regimes. In Shadows and Faces, unity is constructed as an ethical confrontation and a search for common reason in the face of fear and uncertainty. In The Unknown Prisoners, unity is constructed through the memory of the missing, the ethical weight of testimony, and the transformation of collective mourning into social solidarity. In Code Name Venus, unity becomes a more explicit and central narrative through the codes of historical threat, love of homeland, sacrifice, resistance, and heroism. Considered together, these three orientations reveal that Turkish Cypriot cinema treats the discourse of national unity not only at the level of propaganda, but also through allegory, memory, trauma, testimony, dramatization, and myth-making.

4.1. Shadows and Faces: Shadow, Screen, and Ethical Confrontation

Shadows and Faces constructs the discourse of national unity in Turkish Cypriot cinema not through a direct rhetoric of heroism, but through dense metaphors such as shadow, screen, cave, puppet, and image. In the film, the Karagöz screen turns into both the cinema screen and the ideological surface that covers social reality. The relationship between what is seen in front of the screen and the mechanism that remains behind it invites reflection on the connection between the visible conflicts of Cypriot history and the fear, ambition, manipulation, and nationalist discourse that made those conflicts possible. Therefore, national unity in the film is represented not only as cohesion against an external threat, but also as an ethical necessity requiring the human being to confront his or her own shadow.

Ruhsar, who occupies a central position in the film, is not merely a girl searching for her father; she is also the innocent witness of a fragmented social memory. The disappearance of her father, Salih, goes beyond an individual family drama and symbolizes the Turkish Cypriot community's loss of security, continuity, and everyday life. Ruhsar's journey makes the moral destruction of war visible through a child's gaze. This choice invites the viewer to experience trauma through vulnerability and loss without forcing a directly ideological position. Through the child's testimony, the discourse of national unity ceases to be an abstract political concept and turns into an existential need for security. The metaphor of the shadow in Shadows and Faces operates in a double direction. On the one hand, it represents the dark traces of the past falling onto the present; on the other hand, it reveals the ambitions, fears, anger, and desire for revenge that people avoid confronting. Representatives of the older generation such as Veli, Anna, Cevdet, and Dimitri are associated more strongly with prudence, neighbourliness, and the culture of shared life in the past, whereas younger characters such as Ahmet and Hristo are positioned as figures in whom ideological manipulation turns into anger and violence. This contrast shows that the film is not built solely on the Turkish-Greek Cypriot distinction, but also processes the conflict between generations, ethical consciousness, and ideological blindness. It is significant that Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot characters are not visually separated in a rigid manner. Except for signs such as uniform and weapon, bodies, faces, everyday gestures, and modes of speech often belong to a shared island culture. This reminds the viewer that the “other” is not an absolute stranger, but a neighbour who once shared the same space, greeting, language, and everyday life. Thus, while producing a discourse of national unity, the film does not rely on the complete demonization of the other. However, its narrative focus remains the fear, threat, and displacement experienced by Turkish Cypriots. The film therefore offers an invitation to pluralistic confrontation while keeping the traumatic memory of the Turkish community at the centre.

From the perspective of Barthes's concept of myth, the discourse of national unity in Shadows and Faces is not directly sloganized; it is naturalized through fear, loss, defence, and confrontation. The spectator arrives at the idea of unity not so much as a political call, but as a requirement of survival and moral balance in the face of violence. The burial of the Karagöz figures appears as the burial of a repressed past, yet the return of the figures implies that repressed historical shadows may re-emerge. In this context, the film thinks through memory not in terms of repression but in terms of confrontation. National unity can become durable only for a society capable of looking at its shadow, questioning what lies behind the screen, and recognizing its own anger.

These findings show that the theme of national unity and solidarity is clearly present in the film. The perception of homeland, collective historical consciousness, solidarity in the face of threat, and motifs of collective identity are used systematically. Nevertheless, although it is a post-2000 production, the film does not fully transform into a pluralistic narrative. It does not entirely exclude the other side; however, it constructs historical experience primarily through the trauma of Turkish Cypriots. For this reason, Shadows and Faces departs from the monological narratives of the earlier period without fully entering a pluralistic universe of representation. More precisely, it is positioned between critical allegory and traumatic subjectivity.

4.2. The Unknown Prisoners Documentary: Testimony, the Missing Body, and Collective Mourning

The Unknown Prisoners Documentary constructs the discourse of national unity and solidarity through testimony, remembrance, and the search for justice rather than through a heroic narrative. At the centre of the documentary are disappearances during the 1963-1974 period, experiences of captivity, the role of journalists, archival records, and the narratives of survivors. This structure prevents the documentary from being merely a production that transmits historical information; it turns it into a field of representation oriented toward the repair of collective memory. Cem Kar's documentary language does not leave the viewer as an external observer of events; it turns the viewer into an ethical addressee of the missing, silenced testimonies, and deferred demands for justice. The image of the "missing body" constitutes the central semiotic axis of the documentary. The missing person does not signify only an individual who cannot be found; it also signifies legal invisibility, a void in social memory, the incomplete mourning process of families, and interstate silence. Photographs, lists of names, newspaper clippings, and interviews become documents of absence. At this point, the documentary represents presence through absence: the unseen body occupies the centre of the image. In Barthesian terms, the photograph of the missing is, at the denotative level, the visual trace of an individual; at the connotative level, it is the symbol of resistance against forgetting, the demand for justice, and the need for social unity. The sound design and use of music in the documentary strengthen the atmosphere of collective mourning. Lament-like tones, silence, narration, and the fragile rhythm of testimony allow the viewer not only to understand events cognitively, but also to feel them affectively. This affect enables the discourse of national unity to be established not on a propagandistic ground, but on a mourning-centred ground. The documentary produces the concept of "unity" not through grand political statements, but through the sharing of pain. The words of relatives of the missing and surviving witnesses reconstruct national identity through a practice of collective remembrance. Here, unity is, before mobilization against an external threat, the act of naming and making visible those who have been forgotten.

Archival footage and newspaper clippings reinforce the documentary's claim to reality. In fictional films, the viewer identifies with characters; in documentary, the viewer is confronted with the weight of testimony. This makes the ideological effect of the documentary both stronger and more implicit, because documentary form renders the bond between image and reality more direct. Nevertheless, The Unknown Prisoners is not simply a historical file that provides information. Through re-enactments, dramatic transitions, close-ups of faces, and a musical structure, it establishes a cinematic dramaturgy of feeling. This dramaturgy shows that collective memory is constructed not only through reason but also through affective intensity.

The main strategy through which the documentary constructs the discourse of national unity is the transformation of shared pain into social solidarity. Heroism in the film is therefore associated less with success at the front than with the capacity to survive, narrate, refuse silence, and remind. As witnesses narrate their individual stories, they in fact produce a collective subject. The statement "I experienced this" expands within the documentary into the meaning of "we experienced this." This transformation is the most powerful documentary mechanism of the discourse of national unity. Through the suffering of individual people, the spectator reaches the shared history of a community.

In terms of the hypotheses, The Unknown Prisoners Documentary constructs a strong discourse of national unity and solidarity. Motifs of sacrifice, victimhood, solidarity, loss, justice, and historical continuity recur throughout the documentary. However, the narrative of the documentary relies largely on a singular historical perspective. Alternative narratives or forms of counter-memory receive limited visibility. For this reason, while the production has a strong ethical and human sensitivity, it remains limited in terms of pluralistic representation. This is both the strength and the limitation of the documentary: it renders suffering powerfully visible, but only limitedly discusses the circulation of suffering among different sides. Nevertheless, it is an extremely important cinematic memory work in terms of bringing the invisible traumas of the Turkish Cypriot community into public memory.

4.3. Code Name Venus: Dramatic History, Heroism, and National Belonging

Among the three productions examined, Code Name Venus is the film that dramatizes the discourse of national unity and solidarity most explicitly. The narrative, which covers the broad historical period between 1955 and 1974, intertwines individual stories with historical turning points such as British colonial administration, EOKA violence, the establishment of the TMT, the fragile structure of the Republic of Cyprus, the 1963 Bloody Christmas events, the defence of Erenköy, and the 1974 Peace Operation. This structure makes the film not merely a period drama, but a large-scale representational text that presents the existential struggle of the Turkish Cypriot community within a chronological chain of memory. In the film, the character of Yasemin becomes the metaphorical body of Cyprus. Her search initially appears as an effort to find her lost family, but it soon becomes connected to the hidden history of the island, religious-political intrigues, and the struggle over possession. The coercive and violent approaches of Adamos and Savvas toward Yasemin can be read as the symbolic equivalents of forces that seek to seize the island according to their own ideologies. Kemal's protective and loving approach toward Yasemin represents the “rightful protector” position assigned to the Turkish side within the film. This contrast clearly reveals the ideological centre of the film: Cyprus is not an object to be possessed by violence, but a homeland and a field of honour to be protected.

The TMT oath is one of the most important scenes in which Code Name Venus condenses the discourse of national unity. At the denotative level, the oath is organizational commitment and acceptance of duty; at the connotative level, it brings together concepts such as personal security, sacred values, honour, secrecy, sacrifice, and commitment even at the cost of death. This scene transforms the individual character into a collective subject. Kemal is no longer merely an individual; he becomes the representative of the Turkish Cypriot community's will to defend itself. From the perspective of Barthes's concept of myth, the oath scene constructs national resistance as a natural and necessary moral obligation.

British characters in the film are often positioned as representatives of colonial reason, calculating diplomacy, and the strategy of divide and rule. This representation enables the Cyprus issue to be considered not merely as a Turkish-Greek Cypriot conflict, but as a complex geopolitical order involving external powers. Makarios, Grivas, EOKA members, and radical Greek Cypriot characters represent the field in which ideological blindness and the Enosis objective merge with violence. By contrast, the film does not entirely vilify Greek Cypriot society; through conscientious characters such as Eleni and Khole, it shows that human sensitivity may cross ethnic boundaries. In this respect, Code Name Venus is not a wholly one-dimensional representation despite its strong Turkish point of view.

The multilingual structure of the film is also noteworthy. The representation of Turkish characters through Turkish Cypriot dialect, Greek Cypriot characters through Greek or accented Turkish, and British characters through English demonstrates that language is not only a medium of communication but also a marker of historical identity. Language carries memory here. Every accent and every lexical preference points to the multilayered sociopolitical texture of the island. This choice anchors the film in local reality while also preserving Cyprus's multilingual and multicultural past on the cinematic plane. Toward the end of Code Name Venus, the use of real news footage, references to Makarios's speech at the United Nations, Michael Nicholson's live report on 20 July 1974, and Rauf Denktaş's historical speech support the dramatic fiction with documentary reality. This technique reminds the viewer that what is narrated is not merely fictional, but grounded in historical events with an equivalent in collective memory. The transition between fiction and archive enables the film to strengthen its discourse of national unity with documentary legitimacy as well as emotional force.

In terms of the hypotheses, Code Name Venus presents a structure that clearly supports the discourse of national unity and solidarity. Motifs of heroism, sacrifice, national belonging, historical responsibility, defence of homeland, and social resilience are repeated forcefully. However, although the film belongs to the post-2000 period, it continues to construct the discourse of national unity within a dominant and central ideological framework. There are elements of pluralistic narration, but the main dramatic weight rests on the line of Turkish Cypriot victimhood, resistance, and legitimate defence. Therefore, while the film partially approaches pluralistic representation, it also carries the continuity of a heroism-centred national narrative.

4.4. Comparative Synthesis

When the three films are considered together, it becomes clear that the discourse of national unity and solidarity is not constructed through a single cinematic formula. Shadows and Faces produces the idea of unity through the ethical tension between shadow and truth. The Unknown Prisoners constructs the idea of unity through the remembrance of missing people and the sharing of collective mourning. Code Name Venus renders the idea of unity visible through homeland, duty, sacrifice, and historical resistance. The difference between these three forms shows that Turkish Cypriot cinema reproduces the theme of national unity not merely as an ideological slogan, but through different emotional and aesthetic regimes.

The central emotion in Shadows and Faces is unease. The film places the viewer within a dark, uncertain, and symbolic atmosphere. The central emotion in The Unknown Prisoners is mourning. The film leaves the viewer alone with silences, faces, names, and traces of the missing. The central emotion in Code Name Venus is resistance and hope. The film combines historical suffering with a narrative of heroism and deliverance. These emotional differences show that the discourse of national unity is constructed not only cognitively but also affectively. A society sometimes unites in the face of fear, sometimes clings to itself in mourning, and sometimes mobilizes around hope and resistance.

There are also clear differences among the three productions in terms of ideological position. Shadows and Faces avoids explicit propaganda and establishes an allegorical and philosophical distance. The Unknown Prisoners foregrounds human rights, testimony, and the ethics of confrontation. Code Name Venus has a more explicit patriotic discourse; its propaganda codes are visible, yet emotional dramatization makes these codes stronger and more accessible for the viewer. Thus, the three films process the national memory of the Turkish Cypriot community on three distinct levels: intellectual confrontation, documentary testimony, and dramatic mobilization. From a cinematographic perspective, Shadows and Faces foregrounds low-key lighting, narrow frames, compositions referring to shadow-play aesthetics, and the use of silence. In The Unknown Prisoners, cold tones, close-up faces, archival transitions, photographs, lists, and lament-like music are decisive. In Code Name Venus, more rhythmic editing, dramatic conflict, period-specific spaces, multilingual dialogue, war news, and historical speeches that rise toward the ending are prominent. These technical differences show that each film constructs the discourse of national unity in accordance with its own formal structure.

In conclusion, although the three productions share the same historical memory, they differ through their representational strategies. Shadows and Faces implies that unity is impossible without confrontation with the past. The Unknown Prisoners presents the remembrance of forgotten losses as an ethical precondition for unity. Code Name Venus emphasizes that sacrifice and resistance in the face of historical threat hold society together. Turkish Cypriot cinema thus produces the discourse of national unity in a multilayered manner along defensive, reparative, and dramatic-heroic axes.

5. Discussion

The findings show that the discourse of national unity and solidarity in Turkish Cypriot cinema is not merely a political message; it is a way of organizing collective memory. While cinema recalls historical events, it also reconstructs them within particular regimes of emotion and meaning. The conflict, siege, loss, forced migration, and security threat experienced by the Turkish Cypriot community do not constitute only the background of the narrated events in these films; they are located at the very centre of the representational strategies. The films therefore do more than transmit the historical past; they determine how that past will be felt and from which ethical position it will be remembered.

One of the most important findings of the study is that although post-2000 films about Cyprus developed more complex representational strategies than earlier films, they did not abandon the discourse of national unity. On the contrary, this discourse is reproduced within new forms. In Shadows and Faces, national unity is constructed not through the direct language of heroism but through trauma, confrontation, and the need for common reason. In The Unknown Prisoners, national unity is constructed through the recognition of pain and the rendering visible of the missing. In Code Name Venus, a more classical narrative of patriotism, sacrifice, and resistance is maintained, but individual stories and multilingual structure provide a certain degree of human expansion. This indicates that representation in Turkish Cypriot cinema does not progress along a simple line from “old propaganda” to “new pluralism.” A more accurate assessment would be to say that representational forms become hybridized. New-period films open themselves, on the one hand, to empathy, confrontation, polyphony, and the search for human commonality; on the other hand, they continue to centre the Turkish Cypriot community's memory of historical victimhood and defence. This hybrid structure is frequently observed in the traumatic historical narratives of small communities. A society expresses, on one side, a desire for peace and shared life, while on the other side it does not wish to relinquish its security memory and existential anxiety.

Barthes's concept of myth is important for understanding this hybrid structure. In the films, national unity is often presented as a natural and necessary truth, even though it is a historically constructed ideological discourse. Yet this naturalization does not function in the same way in every film. In Code Name Venus, myth is more explicit: images of homeland, oath, heroism, sacrifice, and deliverance clearly produce national meaning. In The Unknown Prisoners, myth is quieter: photographs of the missing, testimonies, and mourning turn the feeling of unity into a natural ethical obligation. In Shadows and Faces, myth is interrogated: by showing how shadows are produced, the film exposes the mechanism of ideological representation. Zaim's film therefore does not merely produce myth; it also makes myth visible. From the perspective of collective memory, the films represent three different layers of the Turkish Cypriot community's relation to the past. The first layer is traumatic remembrance: loss, fear, attack, expulsion from home, and uncertainty. The second layer is ethical testimony: the documentation, narration, non-denial, and intergenerational transmission of pain. The third layer is the founding narrative: the reconstruction of shared identity through sacrifice, solidarity, love of homeland, and resilience. These three layers show that Turkish Cypriot cinema does not only transmit the pains of the past; it also reveals how the community understands itself today.

Another point that requires discussion is the representation of the other. The films examined do not represent Greek Cypriot society to the same extent or with the same degree of complexity. Shadows and Faces constructs a more nuanced structure in humanizing Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot characters; through Anna, Dimitri, and Hristo, it shows both conscience and ideological blindness. Code Name Venus includes good Greek Cypriot characters, yet positions the main conflict more explicitly along the axis of EOKA, Enosis, and violence. The Unknown Prisoners, due to its documentary subject, focuses on the experience of loss and captivity among Turkish Cypriots. This situation clearly reveals the subjective position of the films in producing historical memory. What is important in an academic reading at Scopus level is not to deny this subjective position, but to render it visible and analyse it. This article argues that Turkish Cypriot cinema stands at a tense point between peace and unity. Peace points to an ethical and political desire for a bi-communal future, whereas unity represents the Turkish Cypriot community's need to protect its own historical existence. The films examined do not always reconcile these two concepts easily. In some scenes, unity appears as a precondition for peace; in others, the desire for peace requires the critical rethinking of unity. This tension is one of the key elements that makes Cypriot cinema academically valuable. The films do not only produce social consensus; they also reveal the difficulties of remembering, the limits of confrontation, and the ethical risks of representation.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how the discourse of national unity and solidarity is constructed in Turkish Cypriot cinema through the examples of Shadows and Faces, The Unknown Prisoners Documentary, and Code Name Venus. As a result of qualitative, semiotic, and comparative analysis, three central conclusions were reached. First, the discourse of national unity is clearly present in all three productions; however, it is not constructed through the same aesthetic and ideological form in each film. Second, signs such as homeland, sacrifice, loss, testimony, shadow, screen, oath, archive, photograph, lament, village, home, and official speech carry connotative meanings that serve the production of collective memory and national identity beyond their denotative meanings. Third, although post-2000 films about Cyprus open more humane, more ethical, and partly more pluralistic narrative spaces, they continue to place the Turkish Cypriot community's memory of existence, security, and victimhood at the centre. Shadows and Faces constructs the discourse of national unity not by directly glorifying it, but through confrontation with human shadows and repressed social traumas. In this film, unity is the result of common reason, conscience, and the courage of self-questioning in an age of fear and chaos. The Unknown Prisoners Documentary reveals the unifying power of collective mourning through missing bodies and testimonies. In this production, unity emerges through the demand for justice and the responsibility of remembrance. Code Name Venus, by contrast, explicitly constructs the discourse of national unity through the codes of dramatic history, heroism, sacrifice, and patriotism; it strengthens the sense of national belonging by combining historical events with individual stories.

The research demonstrates that Turkish Cypriot cinema is an important communicative field in the production of collective memory. Cinema does not merely represent the past of the Turkish Cypriot community; it also shapes through which symbols, emotions, and ethical questions that past will be remembered. Therefore, Turkish Cypriot cinema is not only a local artistic field, but also a research area that requires deeper examination within the literatures of international communication, memory studies, trauma representation, and political cinema.

Three recommendations may be offered for future research. First, a broader corpus of Cyprus-themed films should be constructed in order to compare systematically the representational strategies of the early and later periods. Second, audience reception studies should be conducted to investigate how these films are interpreted by Turkish Cypriot, Greek Cypriot, Turkish, and international audiences. Third, co-productions by Turkish and Greek Cypriot directors should be analysed as a separate research line in the contexts of peacebuilding and cultural diplomacy. Cinema does not have to be a medium that freezes the pains of the past; when used responsibly, it can make possible confrontation, empathy, and a more just shared memory oriented toward the future.

7. Limitations and Academic Contribution

The main limitation of this research is that it covers only three productions. Although the sample is suitable for in-depth analysis, it does not claim to represent all periods of Turkish Cypriot cinema. In addition, the study focuses on film texts and does not offer an empirical reception analysis based on audience responses, box-office data, festival circulation, production conditions, or original interviews with directors. The findings are therefore limited to the semiotic and thematic analysis of the film texts.

Despite these limitations, the study makes three academic contributions. First, by addressing the discourse of national unity in Turkish Cypriot cinema comparatively across different genres, it seeks to move beyond the thematic narrowness of the existing literature. Second, by combining Barthes's semiotic concepts with the literatures on collective memory and trauma cinema, it proposes an interdisciplinary analytical model. Third, it enables the cinematic representations of the Turkish Cypriot community to be read not only at the level of political propaganda or historical document, but also in terms of ethical testimony, confrontation, and identity construction. In these respects, the article offers an original academic framework that can be used in communication studies, film studies, cultural memory, and political representation.

Ethical Statement, Conflict of Interest, Funding, and Data Availability

Ethics Committee Statement: This study is based on document and audiovisual text analysis of publicly accessible feature films, documentary materials, and secondary academic sources. It does not involve a new field study with human participants. Therefore, it is a theoretical and qualitative text analysis that does not require ethics committee approval.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest in

relation to this study.

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Data Availability Statement: The primary data of the research consist of publicly accessible film and documentary texts. The secondary data consist of academic literature, film information, archival news materials, and related publications.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis Matrix

Axis	Shadows and Faces	The Unknown Prisoners	Code Name Venus
Genre / Form	Fiction; allegorical drama.	Documentary; testimony and re-enac	Fiction; dramatic-action and romanti narrative.
Temporal / Period Focus	The 1963-1974 line of tension; the th civil conflict.	Missing persons during and after the period; memory after loss.	A broad historical panorama extendi 1955 to 1974.
Narrative Axis	Invisible power and manipulation thr metaphors of shadow and screen.	Testimony, remembrance, confrontat image of the missing body.	A linear story driven by resistance, s individual courage.
Theme of National Unity	Unity is constructed as the necessity reason and solidarity in the face of fe chaos.	Unity emerges as quiet solidarity pro collective mourning and the demand	Unity is explicitly elevated through p duty, and sacrifice.
Semiotic Motifs	Karagöz screen, shadow/image, pupp visible/invisible power.	Photograph, lists of names, archive, e closed space, symbols of absence.	Flag, uniform, letter, oath, entrusted Crescent tent, historical speeches.
Subject / Character Construction	Ordinary people; an ethics of surviva confrontation beyond rigid sides.	Witnesses and relatives of the missin collective subject.	Resistant heroes; the unity of individ community.
Ideological Position	Allegorical distance rather than expli propaganda; the spectator is position critical reader.	Human rights and the ethics of confr human story rather than overt politic	Explicit patriotic discourse; visible p codes, although the emotional tone is
Emotional Tone	Tension, unease, uncertainty.	Melancholy, mourning, and the desir	Hope, courage, and romantic tension
Cinematography / Sound	Low-key lighting, narrow framing, s aesthetics, contrast between sound an	Cold tones, archival footage, close-u lament-like or ambient music.	Contrasting tones, rhythmic editing, music, and an archive-supported end
Source of Reality	Symbolic fictional reality.	Documentary reality through archive and re-enactment.	Fictional realism supported by period and historical references.
Method of Constructing Unity	A necessary outcome of common rea solidarity in an age of fear.	The transformation of shared sufferin solidarity.	Emotional mobilization and modellin heroic narrative.
Limits / Risks	The density of allegory may keep so spectators at an analytical distance.	The centrality of testimony may redu variation.	The film may risk schematic charact emotional excess.

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